

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - Autumn 2000

Listed Status for former Palace Cinema

EARLY in October, English Heritage listed the Palace Grade II. It is still standing because the Society fought for it at a public inquiry.

Like a lot of good deals, the Palace was saved in a pub. In the Eldon Arms in 1974, a year after the society was founded, we persuaded EMI Cinemas to fight the city council's compulsory purchase order. The city wanted to put another spanning office block across what was still Commercial Road, sealing off the southern end of the city centre - as they had done by the station. They had to issue a leaflet "Guildhall: How To Get There, Where to Park" because people could no longer find it.

The case for the cinema was a positive one. Every city needs its jokes, and as a cinema it's pretty unusual with its Islamic zinc domes and front to back circulation: you came in under the screen. Andy Nash, in his study of AE Cogswell* at the School of Architecture, discovered that he had enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in the First World War and served in India including the Khyber Pass. When he came back he used Indian motifs to great effect, constructing the cinema in 1924, near his much lamented Water Company Building (destroyed for Winston Churchill Avenue). Cogswell also designed many pubs on Portsmouth.

By the 1970s the Palace was home to films for the dirty mac brigade, but that didn't worry us. We gathered important allies such as David Lloyd, Geoffrey Broadbent and David Attwell, cinema historian, and won the day. It was our third public inquiry, after the Theatre Royal and St. Agathas, and it showed that it was sometimes possible to win if you stood up and fought for something you believed in.

*in Local Studies section, Norrish Central Library

Celia Clark



The Palace Cinema as it was - Deane Clark

Future Programme

Meetings are on the 1st Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm, Norrish Central Library, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth. Admission free - all are welcome.

Wednesday 1st November

Buildings of the Isle of Wight

David Lloyd

Thursday 2nd November

Planning your Wildlife Garden

Hants & IOW Wildlife Trust at Portsmouth Guildhall. Booking essential, tel. 023 8061 3636.

Wednesday 6th December

David Levitt of architects Levitt

Bernstein

Designer of the *original* scheme for April Square Landport.

Wednesday 7th February

Martin Heighton

Chief Executive of the Mary Rose Trust

Wednesday 7th March

Professor Geoffrey Broadbent

Recent Museum Buildings

Wednesday 4th April

Annual General Meeting

Ship building to return to Portsmouth Dockyard?

THE Society was recently taken to task because we asked John Prescott to call in the application by Vosper Thornycroft for what would be the largest ever building in Portsmouth, a shipbuilding hall in Portsmouth Dockyard. We were even accused by a councillor and the local press of jeopardising the return of shipbuilding to the city.

The proposal is to build a major new shipbuilding block assembly hall and covered berths over several docks in No.2 Basin, with

a maximum height of 39 metres covering up to 49,600 square metres for production of Type 45 destroyers. Our criticism was that the design was not good enough for such an important location. Its sheer scale will alter the setting of the listed Unicorn Gate; instead of cranes we will see its dull grey bulk. It is so large it will be a new feature in the landscape and skyline of the dockyard and alter the views from land and sea.

Current Government policy, such as PPG 1, emphasises the importance of design in the

landscape. We were unable to persuade the planning officers to recommend design improvements. So we objected and requested a deputation to the Development Control Committee. Had we not done this the application would have been passed by the officers without comment. (See Planning in Decline, page 3) . We alerted English Heritage who were initially unaware of the application; they wrote letters of objection.

Our calculated risk paid off. The Government Office of the South East, representing John Prescott, refused to call in the application. Councillors approved it, but with the condition that the applicants and the planning officers must work with English Heritage to improve the design. The chairman of the committee has assured us that English Heritage would be consulted on design.

The Society now hopes that the largest new building in Portsmouth will now have some quality in its design. We have no objection to the intensified use of the docks; and of course we welcome the return of shipbuilding to the Dockyard.

Celia Clark

Gardens for Wildlife

"A Garden without a pond is like a theatre without a stage" was the opening sentence by Claire Taylor at the society's October meeting. Claire is the Urban Wildlife Officer for the Hampshire & the Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust with a remit to encourage gardening with wildlife in mind in urban South Hampshire. Surprisingly, domestic gardens are probably the best environments for supporting wildlife in our area and Claire spoke enthusiastically about what we can all do to help. We are also very fortunate in having an extremely rich variety of flora and fauna in our city, helped by the

mild climate and the fact that we are an island.

At the top of Claire's list is the use of chemicals, in particular slug pellets. The answer is don't use them! Slug pellets are responsible for demise of some of our native bird species for slugs which eat them are often consumed by birds with devastating effect. The best way to reduce your garden's slug population is to encourage the natural predators such as hedgehogs, birds, frogs and toads (this is where the pond comes into the picture!).

Aphids are a nuisance and if you must spray use only a mixture of water and washing-up liquid. Again, natural predators will come to the rescue but they won't if chemicals are used!

Wildlife gardens need not be wild gardens. It is a common misconception that wildlife gardens are overgrown jungles. They are not! The Trust has created a "tidy" wildlife garden in Southampton, between the BBC building and the Central Station. She is trying to persuade Portsmouth City Council to give her a small plot in the City, but they are wary that it will deter from the prize-winning displays we are lucky to have. Even a concrete planter in the city will do!

Those with space only for a tub or window box can help by planting with meadow-mix or herbs to reap a colourful and wildlife friendly display. Other useful hints and tips are available in a leaflet which we will distribute to all members with this newsletter or by contacting the trust at 8 Romsey Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire SO50 9AL.

Claire is holding a workshop session at Portsmouth Guildhall on Thursday 2nd November entitled "Planning your wildlife garden". Places must be booked in advance by calling 023 8061 3636

John Holland

Planning in Decline

We have sent this letter to the Chairman of the Development Control Committee and the Leader of the Council:

We, in the Portsmouth Society, have for some time been worried about the lack of control exercised by the elected members over the planning system. Our exasperation was brought to a head by what happened at the meeting of the Development Control Committee on 4 October. This committee consisting of a chairman and only three other members dealt in double quick time with two items of far reaching planning and economic importance - the Vosper-Thorneycroft application for giant boat building sheds in the Dockyard and the ASDA (backed by Walmart) application for redeveloping the Bridge Centre in Fratton. Under the current rules set up eighteen months ago neither of these matters would have been brought before the committee at all had not some asked to speak as deputations against them. There was a time when by writing a letter of objection one could be sure of getting the committee's attention. Not now. In other words unelected officers are now deciding even the most important applications.

It has transpired that even the national agencies - English Heritage and the Environment Agency - are not clear about these new rules. There have been recent instances when by expressing concern or saying they were unhappy about an application they, not unreasonably, imagined that they would be taken as objecting. Not so. Even the Berkeley Festival Waterfront Company, the developers of Gunwharf, imagined they were objecting to the proposal for the joy-rides Millennium Tower, when they said they were concerned about its effect on their development. But

their letter was not regarded as an objection.

The second thing on October 4 that caused us concern was that a second application to build houses on the site of Lucas's sailmakers in Broad Street was on the agenda for the committee that day although the time for representations did not expire until the 6th and the planners were, by their own account, still in discussion on the matter with English Heritage. With the intervention of the MP, or may be because of pressure from another direction, the item was deferred to the next meeting. Whatever the reasons for the eventual deferment it remains a fact that the planning department until somebody intervened, prepared to have the application determined before the expiry of the time for representations.

Our disquiet about the planning department began with the application to build houses on Cow Lane, Cosham, on the grounds of Medina School. When this application was first published we were assured by the planning officer concerned that this would not go through. The department would recommend decisively against it. If it was necessary to sell off council-owned land for housing there was land on the same school site more suitable for housing, as the planning officer agreed. We were then astonished to find that in his report to committee (it was then the Planning Committee) March / April 1999, the Planning Officer recommended permission. We learnt later that he had been overruled by a committee of chief officers and told what his recommendation should be. We presume this was because the land in question was council property. Planning considerations were to be ignored. The fact that it did concern council property was a reason why we asked that the application be determined by the Secretary of State. Unfortunately, this was refused.

When local government reorganisation was proposed we were assured that Planning would remain untouched. It would be the one programme committee to remain. Although it does remain, it is combined with regeneration and economic affairs and it delegates most important planning decisions, even when they are of economic as well as planning importance to a rump - the Development Control Committee - who then do not necessarily discuss them. This was the case with the Dockyard and Bridge Centre applications,

These changes are blamed on the Government's insistence on 'streamlining' local government. We are asking the councillors of the new Conservative administration to do what they can to reinstate proper democratic debate and decision on planning in the future.

Roger James

Friends of Cumberland House

On 14th September Southsea residents gathered at St Simon's Church to debate the future of the Cumberland House on Eastern Parade to form the "Friends of Cumberland House" Society with the aims of keeping the museum open to the public and to preserve the Southsea heritage.

Portsmouth City Council has given a reprieve of six months which will allow the museum to remain open until the end of March 2001 instead of the intended closure in September. This was a result of the petition presented to the leader of the City Council, Ian Gibson which contained over six hundred signatures of local residents, parents of schoolchildren, Southsea East resident's association & other sympathisers.

At the meeting to discuss the closure, the council agreed to set aside £40,000 for the continued running of the museum but

emphasising that the public must "use it or lose it".

With donations of £1000 from the Southsea Town Council, and a personal donation from Cllr Lee Hunt, the Friends of Cumberland House will now set about making a strong financial case for the museum's future. A public meeting is planned for Monday 13th November in the main hall of St Simon's Church at 7.30pm.

The Incinerator Inquiry

In January 1999, as previously reported, although the officers had recommended granting permission, the councillors of the planning committee unanimously voted to refuse permission to Hampshire Waste Services, HWS, to build an incinerator on the site of the old discontinued one in Quatremaire Road. A public inquiry to hear their appeal against this refusal opened in the Guildhall on 12 September and lasted until 11 October.

Because of their divided position the City Council decided to appoint a firm of consultants, Battie, to represent them at the inquiry and a barrister, Sasha White, led the case on their behalf. HWS had a QC, Lionel Read, to lead their case as applicants. At a preliminary hearing, the inspector, Ian Macpherson, had asked the numerous objectors to organise themselves into one or two groups so that he would not be presented with the same evidence over and over again.

Coalition

As the Society's representative on the case, I helped to organise the Coalition of Third Parties and I persuaded Michael Burgess, until recently chairman of the Anchorage Park Neighbourhood Forum, to be our coordinator and in effect our barrister. It was the best thing I did. We print extracts

from his closing address in this newsletter.

Our coalition was formidable: Portsmouth Environmental Forum, Admiral Lord Nelson School, Anchorage Park Neighbourhood Forum, the Portsmouth Society, Drayton and Farlington Neighbourhood Forum and West Bedhampton Residents' Association; and giving evidence on our behalf we had both MPs, the Leader of the Council Ian Gibson and Councillor David Giles of Copnor. We divided our evidence so that as far as possible we each dealt with a different aspect of our case, e.g. Michael Burgess dealt with traffic, David Giles with assessment of risk, the school with safe routes to school and I dealt with need, with the so-called consultation that had preceded the scheme, and Ian Gibson and I both took on flooding and land-raising.

Procedure

The first two weeks were taken up with the case for HWS, given by at least ten witnesses each submitting a book of evidence half an inch thick. The next week was taken up with the Council's case with three expert witnesses with equally voluminous proofs of evidence whose case remained undented by vigorous cross-examination. Our turn came in the fourth week.

There is a contract, Project Integra, whose terms were drawn up before Portsmouth and Southampton, through their new status as unitary authorities, became waste disposal authorities. Previously they had been only waste collection authorities. The terms of the contract were kept secret. But as a result of it all the household waste, recyclable and non-recyclable, from our four neighbouring districts: Gosport, Fareham, Havant and East Hampshire, comes to Portsmouth



Quartermaine Road in flood

for disposal: the recyclables to the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at Quatremaine Road and the other waste amounting to 179,000 tons a year to Paulsgrove landfill site. But only 57,000 tons of this comes from Portsmouth itself and out of this a third is reckoned to be recyclable. Michael Burgess gives our argument for dealing with this.

I had often been asked by those querying our opposition to the incinerator "Well what are you going to do instead?" The answer is we do not need to do anything. Hampshire, the waste disposal authority for our neighbours, should dispose of the waste arising there and not dump it on us.

Floods

The floods of 15 September which were terrible for the people of central Southsea came at an opportune time for the inquiry. First of all the incinerator site itself was flooded - we have pictures of it! This lent force to our case that this was not the right site. And secondly the flooding gave credibility to the Environment Agency's warning of flood danger to much of the north eastern part of the city from the expected rising sea.

Over the centuries this area has been reclaimed and protected by the dumping of waste, and we were able to argue that we might well have to do the same in the immediate future. We would be in a sorry state if, having committed all our waste to the fire, we had to

import some from elsewhere.

Emissions

We left to the capable hands of Friends of the Earth and the council's expert witness, Alan Watson, the detailed case concerning the potentially dangerous emissions from the twin chimneys.

The inspector now writes his report and sends it to the Secretary of State. We do not expect the verdict before April at the earliest.

Roger James

Incinerator Inquiry - the Closing Address

The closing address of the Coalition of Third Party organisations against the incinerator was delivered by Michael Burgess, former chairman of the Anchorage Park Neighbourhood Forum. Here are excerpts from his speech.

Consultation

The one requirement of "consultation" is to have some flexibility or an open mind concerning the result of that "consultation". There has to be a true endeavour to seek the best way forward to solve difficulties.

Hampshire County Council state "The objective of the consultation programme was to obtain a broad base of consent for the County Council to go forward to the next stage of the process..."

Even a cursory glance at the Appendix to the document quoted will satisfy any serious seeker after truth that this objective was never attained.

Need

The aspect of need is entirely predicated upon the Project Integra assumption that all the Waste Arisings will be dealt with within the three arbitrary areas devised by them. It is also assumed that their strategy will be accepted totally and there was therefore no alternative strategy offered by the then one Waste Disposal Authority to the

participating Waste Collection Authorities.

Because of the blinkered, rigid HWS strategic approach this has the very nasty odour of corporate blackmail about it. It is realised that there is no one perfect answer to the perennial problems of waste disposal. There are many different answers and there are many differing ways to arrive at them. An open minded approach by HWS might well succeed at even this late stage and remain within Project Integra

Perception

The public perception in Portsmouth City relating to incineration has effectively an epidemiological history going back many years. It is based back in the fogs and smog of the grimy past. It is inherited wisdom from the respiratory diseases and infections that have plagued Portsmouth's past and continue to plague the present generations. The smuts on the laundry of the seventies are now the dioxins of the nineties. They are not visible on the laundry but they are in our lungs nevertheless.

Traffic

The traffic impact has been sadly underrated. Initially Eastern Road was the only area of concern to HWS's consultants.

The study took little or no notice of the Admiral Lord Nelson School and also for the original application did not consider the total development of the appeal site.

Even after the new documents and submissions to the inquiry it appears that little weight is put upon an increase in HGV traffic alone of 1250 movements each week of the year. It is a real matter of fear for many parents that if Mr Collis' suggested traffic plan is not being put into practice now with the traffic to and from the Materials Recycling Centre how will it possibly succeed when there are three times as many HGVs. In addition there are the

concerns about the huge weekly number of cars, nearly 8000 weekly, that will use this, the site of the Household Waste Disposal Centre which will move to Quartermaine Road from Paulsgrove. An increase of 25% in road usage in the traffic triangle associated with this site is an unacceptable burden.

Landscape Impact

The proposed building is effectively as large as the one that was proposed some eight or nine years ago. Plainly from any viewpoint both physically and architecturally the proposed building adds a large mass to Portsmouth's skyline. This is no criticism of the architect. It reflects the perception of the local residents.

Air Quality and Emissions

The coalition does not feel that it has the expertise to argue its case fully in these. We do, however, have great difficulty in understanding two matters.

Firstly the assertion that Portsmouth does not have its own micro climate is one which beggars belief. To suggest that Thorney Island, Southampton and Gatwick have similar wind and weather patterns to Portsmouth is quite frankly risible. It is extraordinary that no consideration whatsoever was given to the work being done at Portsmouth University in this regard.

Secondly the emission fall-out gives such grave concern to the Coalition because the highest concentrations will fall for most of the time over the Anchorage Park residential estate, due to the prevailing winds. There is no dispute about this. It is a matter of fact. Also as a matter of fact it is totally unacceptable to all the residents of that area. They have protested about this with great voice, a unanimous vote and not once but on several occasions within the last eight years at the ballot box. They protest not because they are unfeeling about

waste management but because they perceive that they are in danger from this proposal.

Landraising

It is a matter of established fact that Portsea Island has been the subject of landfill and landraising for centuries. Most of the eastern half of the island has been made habitable in this way. The recent phenomenon of global warming and the raising of the sea level has led the Environment Agency to issue a map that delineates the tidal flood levels of areas of Portsea Island that may be a risk in the future. The fact that this very clearly includes the proposed incinerator site seems not to be worthy of mention by HWS. We wonder whether the planning aspects of this have been fully considered for a plant of this size with a life expectancy of about thirty years.

Socio-Economic Considerations

Portsmouth is an island city and has a toehold on the mainland. It is a city that has for centuries thrived upon adversity. It more than any other city in the United Kingdom, has suffered over the centuries from destruction by fire and sword. January 1941 is not forgotten, even by those who were but ten years old at the time.

Because it was and still is a garrison city it has a different social and economic make up to most cities of comparable size. There are areas of considerable poverty which give all of us who have appeared before you during this week some considerable concern. We do not wish Portsmouth to become a social sink. We are not the dustbin of South East Hampshire.

We are not planners, we are not experts with your knowledge and skills, we are not trained to talk dispassionately about morbidity ratios; we may deal in smut but in the main we do not understand particulates. We are talking about people, our children and grandchildren.

The Great Morass reappears - Southsea flood

Southsea had a serious flood on 15 September. Not life-threatening like the tragedies in the Alps, but bad enough for mild England. It rained stair-rod all morning - about two inches, when the main sewage pumping engines for the city at Eastney failed. Apparently the flash flood happened so suddenly that the men at the pumping station had to jump out of the way or they would have been drowned... So much for the millions of pounds they have spent "improving" the drainage of a very flat city, much of which is below sea level! So all the sewage and stormwater was pumped upwards into the low lying area between the Strand and Clarendon Gardens, creating raging torrents along St. Catherine's Street and Somerset Road, down Florence Road to its lowest point, through the 1970s houses facing Malvern Road, creating a lake in Clarendon Gardens. The ancient watercourses in this area reasserted themselves and poured straight through people's houses.

The fountains pushing up through the drains were such an amazing sight and the waters rushing down the street instead of traffic, were at first simply astonishing. A rubber boat appeared outside the Florence Arms, and a guy with a pint in his hand waded to tell us that the bar was knee-deep, but they were still serving beer. People waded about without shoes to see what was happening round the corner. Then the seriousness of it hit us. A lorry appeared with sandbags, but we couldn't wade in deep enough to get one before they were all given out. We could see our friend Hazel in the lowest part of Florence Road looking distraught. A helicopter circled overhead, which was extremely annoying. Deane waved two fingers at it as

he tried to stop our back yard filling up with water pushing up through the drains. Then, quite separately water began to well up through our floorboards downstairs, to a depth of about three inches in the kitchen, dining room and passageway, higher than the water outside. Horrid! Because it happened fairly slowly for us, at the edge of the flood, we were able to move our carpets including the special one from Azerbaijan upstairs. But people in the lowest point of Florence Road lost everything downstairs: all family mementos, collections of paintings, new carpets, CDs, covered with a stinking sewage mess.

George Thompson tried to bail out his feet-deep garden, now a large pond, with a small bucket, and hurt his back trying to reach a neighbour. Cars were stranded in the eddying water. Round the corner in Somerset Road things were much worse. One old lady was trapped when her freezer floated across to the staircase and jammed itself there, and then her china cupboard, full of special old china fell over into the flood. One man dropped his special record collection in a panic and smashed it.

After about three hours, the fire brigade eventually laid long hoses and pumped the water down to the sea, but we realise now why the roads round here are called "Beach Road" and "The Strand" - which was deeply flooded. My neighbour Jean lent me a special machine for sucking up water - which she uses to empty drains - so we were able to clear the water fairly quickly, a relief because doing it by hand meant trying to sweep it uphill into the kitchen... By seven we had managed to suck up the water in our house, but people in Somerset Road whose houses are below the pavement were still desperately throwing water out of their living room windows

Over the next weeks, the streets



The Strand in flood, with a backdrop of the award winning Mural.

filled with skips of sodden carpets, furniture, treasured possessions... The tip must have grown considerably and we are all considering suing Southern Water - or getting our insurance companies to do it. We would all like to see those photos taken from that helicopter. St. Swithuns School Hall was packed for the public meeting on 2 October, with people standing outside listening through the windows. The stories of how people's lives were affected and the anger against a man-made disaster was only barely restrained. How dare Southern Water say it was an Act of God!

Horrors - it's raining again! We are all afraid of another flood. The warnings of what to do are quite useless. What use is a sandbag if the water comes up straight from below? We have no foundations, just bare earth under our house, and it's still sodden and stinks, three weeks later. Further down the road, the concrete raft other houses are on is cracking up, and the cost of propping it up, by pumping in more concrete, is likely to exceed the whole of the £20,000 hardship fund donated by Southern Water.



Somerset Road - one of the worst affected streets

Seeing your street turn into a raging torrent is a nasty shock, though we did get to speak to our neighbours much more. We are also very aware that we are below sea level in this part of the city, behind the raised beach of the seafront. The sea has come over before: the Rock Gardens filled with seawater in 1953. No wonder "For Sale" notices are going up.

Celia Clark

Rail Franchise Bids

As many of you will be aware there are only three remaining companies bidding to run the South West Trains (SWT) franchise. SWT is responsible for train services between Portsmouth and London Waterloo, Portsmouth and Southampton, Brighton to Reading (via Havant and Cosham), and also for the management of stations in Portsmouth.

Connex and Group 4 have failed to make the short list, which leaves First Group, GNER holdings and the current operators Stagecoach to fight it out. Brochures are currently available from First Group (tel 020 7291 0512) and from Stagecoach (with great difficulty). GNER, the current operators of rail services from London King's Cross to the north east of England and Scotland, do not currently have a brochure available.

franchises. Central to First Group's proposal is the construction of a tunnel from Wimbledon to King's Cross via Wandsworth, Clapham, Chelsea, Victoria and Tottenham Court Road. Apparently most of the passengers to Waterloo do not actually want to go there at all. First group claim the proposed tunnel will provide greater flexibility for these passengers. However, the feasibility of such a scheme is surely questionable. Many stations within London are earmarked for regeneration, but these details extend no further than the capital. New rolling stock is promised but no details of this are given other than this would be delivered between 2005-2012.

The frequency of trains between "main centres and London" will be "at least every 30 minutes and more frequently during peak periods". Currently trains run every 15 minutes off-peak. Trains will all be fitted with automatic train protection system by the end of 2003 to improve safety. Security at stations will be improved but no details are given. Customer information will be improved but only vague details are given. Integration between other forms of transport does not appear to be widely welcomed by First Group, surprising since they run the majority of buses within the city. They promise at least 20 covered cycle parking spaces at every station and the introduction

Unfortunately both of the currently available brochures are extremely lacking in detail. Surprisingly Portsmouth is not mentioned in either publication!

First Group's Tunnel Vision!

First Group currently operate the Great Western and Great Eastern

of smart card technology, although no further details are given. Cycles will be carried on trains ONLY on OFF-peak services. Cars receive far more detailed consideration than buses. Interestingly First Group claim to have a "proven track record in running rail franchises" and strongly imply that their record is better than that of Stagecoach. This was certainly not the case in the last 'league table' I saw, with First Group and Connex being the only 2 companies to perform worse than Stagecoach!

Stagecoach says ...

In common with the First Group Stagecoach's proposal is also very vague. It would appear that Stagecoach no longer intend to demolish and re-build Waterloo station. Instead they favour extending some of the platforms to enable longer trains to be used to increase capacity. Track layout will be rearranged to enable more trains to use Waterloo station. No tunnel is proposed. £250 million is promised for station regeneration but details of how this will be spent are not given. Will passengers see any changes or will the money be spent on pointless schemes such as repainting waiting room windows which don't close as has recently happened at Havant station. £1.4 billion has been earmarked for new trains with "state-of-the-art" safety.

Apparently Stagecoach is the only company to have delivered new third rail electric trains into service. Anyone wishing to see one should glance out of the window whilst passing through Wimbledon as the trains are permanently parked in the yard as they do not work properly! There are also only 30 of these new trains and, once working, will still leave 200 ageing trains dating from the late fifties and sixties in operation. Again we are promised improved customer information without any details of how this will occur. Extensive integration with bus operators is promised.

Stagecoach claim to have "a strong track record of building relationships between trade unions". Anyone remember the case of Sarah Friday?!!

Best operator for Portsmouth?

It is very difficult to comment on which proposal is best for the people of Portsmouth since both are so ill-defined. The Rail Passengers Committee (RPC) agree with this opinion!

South Central Announcement

The decision as to which company will run the South Central franchise (currently operated by Connex) is expected later this month. I am told that the decision could yet go either way. Connex are not favoured since they have just about the worst track record of any train operating company in the country as any of you who have used their services will no doubt know. Go Via, the current operators of the Thameslink and Thames Trains services also have difficulties since they have a doubtful safety record.

Stephen Cookson

Book News

Countdown to Victory - 101 Questions and Answers about HMS Victory

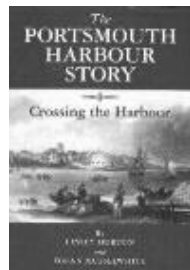


This new book is written by Peter Goodwin, HMS Victory's keeper and curator. It traces the connections between the vessel and her most famous

admiral, Horatio Nelson, debunks popular myths and provides a wealth of detail about the ship and the life of the 820 men who lived on board.

Price: £7.95, Publisher: Manuscript Press, tel: 023 9286 3799 email: ann@dockyards.conx.co.uk

The Portsmouth Harbour Story - Crossing the Harbour by Lesley Burton and Brian Musselwhite



To be published in December, this book tells the history of Portsmouth Harbour from the earliest records to the present day. The 600 yard strip of water

between Gosport and Portsmouth is a familiar scene to all local people, yet it has some tremendous tales to tell.

Price : £19.95 (but £15 if you buy early), Publisher : Halsgrove Publishing, Lower Moor Way, Tiverton, Devon, EX16 6SS. See also www.halsgrove.com.

News from the Dockyard

You will have heard that the Society asked John Prescott to call in Vospers' application to build a vast shipbuilding shed over Nos. 12, 13, 14 & 15 Docks north-east of Unicorn Gate. We did this to get the design improved, calling on English Heritage to help, which they did, suggesting changes in the design such as the windows.

The BBC/BT FutureWorld exhibition in Boathouse 4 could not be better set off than by the soaring industrial structure above it: an exciting fusion which demonstrates the modernity and spatial potential of the building. The exhibition's free and open to 30th October, though you may have to wait for the milling families to finish if you want to get your hands on a computer terminal. At present you cannot see the new lock gates in the north-west corner which now control the flow of water to the mastpond.

The drastic remodelling of the landscaping of the Victory approach is another matter: we

fail to see why so much historic material such as the granite tramway blocks and the railway lines had to be destroyed. Equally, the listed and important Boathouse 6 innovative structure of cast and wrought iron, a masterpiece of assembly, is being taken apart for Action Stations, a new visitor attraction about the modern Royal Navy and the University's Institute for Maritime and Heritage Studies the Royal Navy for Action Stations, a new visitor attraction about the modern Royal Navy, at a total cost of £14 million on one building alone (Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust Annual Report 1999). A large section of the lower floors and structure had to be removed in order for the four new legs of the auditorium built in the bomb damaged area at the back to provide support from ground level. The three huge doorways to the mast pond are to be replaced, and a level platform will be built above the present sloping bank. These changes were not advertised so that we could comment, because Boathouse 6 was redesignated from scheduled ancient monument to listed building only recently.

Celia Clark

Southern Comfort at Gosport

On Saturday 30th September Roger James, Charles Burns and Betty Owen attended "Southern Comfort", the annual get-together of southern region Civic Societies. This year it was held in Gosport, in Bay House School, a former Baring family country house now unobtrusively enlarged into a comprehensive school. We met in a hall with floorlength windows looking on to lawns secluded by mature trees - very gracious and soothing.

The Gosport Society, which publishes papers and booklets on local history, has a cooperative relationship with its local council,

and meets informally with its representatives two or three times a year. The Mayor introduced the conference, and the Chief Executive, Malcolm Crocker, himself a former chief planning officer, spoke to us on Heritage and Regeneration.

Conservation Battles Over?

A recurrent theme of the conference was that the conservation battles of the Civic Societies, many founded in the 70's to fight them, were largely over. No local authority would now contemplate the destruction of old buildings that took place in the 60's and 70's, when, said Malcolm Crocker, Gosport lost its old town. The question now was what to do with the buildings preserved, because an unused building simply decayed. To be used a building had to be part of a lively community; regeneration was more than restoration; it involved the environment, employment, the economy, the well-being of the whole area.

Gosport's Challenges

Gosport, a Navy town for 300 years, had 78,000 people in a peninsula 4.5 miles across, with 30% of its land still owned by and 34% of its employment dependent on the MOD. This over-dependence on one employer must be reduced now significant land releases were expected. Employers might be encouraged to locate in Gosport by its unusual traffic flow, outwards in the morning and inwards at night, so no trouble coming in during the day! Gosport must build on its assets: tidal creeks and marinas with easy access to the Solent; technical skills fostered by the navy; ancient woodland and open spaces like Stokes Bay and the Alver Valley near residential areas, and historic buildings to attract tourists. All these would be advanced by the LRT and promotion of the Arts. The main problems were to attract new employment and to find uses for the buildings about to be

renovated, the forts, the yards and the train station. These uses caused controversy, witness Fort Gilkicker; they must be combined also with work on areas of multiple deprivation which will get worse as navy employment decreases unless employers are attracted into the new areas. All Civic Societies now need to be involved in finding new uses for renovated buildings, bearing in mind the prosperity of their whole area.

Mike Gwilliam, Civic Trust Director

Mike Gwilliam, Director of the Civic Trust, speaking on the Trust and the Societies, endorsed this view: conservation was now accepted, and it was time for co-operation with local authorities. The aim now was to promote local pride among all citizens of the locality. The Civic Trust's contributions to this were the Heritage Open Days, rapidly expanding, its new Green flag Awards for the management of parks and green open spaces (nominations invited), and the proposed Urban Design Alliance to encourage better design in domestic and business architecture. The Societies had great achievements to their credit in conservation, but they were often seen as negative and critical, as they rightly were in the past. Now they should be constructive agents of change, not resistance.

There was a gap between the Trust and the Societies, which the Trust was trying to bridge with regional meetings of representatives of the many societies, to bring their concerns to the trustees and enable them to learn from each other (N.B. Southern Comfort has been doing this for years!) There would be two new Regional Officers, to build a full database on what societies do, promote better e-mail communication and set up regional training seminars; and there might be 3 annual awards to societies for initiative in

recruitment and leaflets. Areas needing renewal could be looked at by the Trust, the local society and the L.A. in co-operation.

In questions these points emerged:

Design: the government was putting more emphasis on it and had produced a £20 book (a bit costly for councillors); sometimes LA's did not have enough design skills in-house; the Trust might offer regional design seminars for officers and especially councillors.

Regional Bodies, many non-elected, were becoming powerful; members should watch out for this and take part; they should not be allowed to weaken elected County Councils.

Coastal Towns: their problems should be of national concern; having ceased to be holiday attractions they should be promoted as excellent environments to live and work in.

We all then were taken by coach round the about-to-be-conserved / developed MOD sites and forts, the preserved Alverstoke Crescent and its garden, a sparkling Stokes Bay and the already handsomely developed waterfront near the ferry. Our thanks to Lesley Burton and the Society for an enjoyably informative day.

There are many points here about what should be the function and main interests of the Portsmouth Society. What do members think?

Betty Owen

The Tricorn

There is life in the old dog yet!

An organisation called GROTT - Get Rid Of The Tricorn - have recently been in touch with us. They represent the (now empty) shops located on the north side of Charlotte Street which are in the Tricorn building. They have apparently been complaining for some years that the Council (the ground landlords) have failed to



This panorama of Lombard Street, Old Portsmouth by Deane Clark featured in the Portsmouth 2000 exhibition. Copies sized 16.5 x 3.5 inches are available from Deane Clark priced at 50p.

insist that Taylor Woodrow (the leaseholders) keep the building in good repair. For a long time the Council have denied GROTT a sight of the lease; but recently they have obtained a copy from the Land Registry.

This does show that the Council had an obligation to insist that Taylor Woodrow keep the building in good order. GROTT have now appealed to the Ombudsman and he has agreed to investigate the matter as a potential case of maladministration.

A cultural forum for Portsmouth?

Members are invited to a first meeting to discuss the future of the arts and culture in Portsmouth on Saturday 4 November at 2.30 p.m. in the Royal Naval Museum Committee Room of Storehouse 11, Portsmouth Naval Base Heritage Area.

As you will know very well, lively economically successful cities also have vibrant well-supported arts and culture. Portsmouth has numerous artists, film-makers, musicians, singers, actors, designers, architects, dancers, writers: novelists, playwrights, poets; sound recordists, historians, ecologists, wildlife enthusiasts... Many of these attended a lively arts event organised by Portsmouth City Council a year or two ago. It demonstrated the creativity of

local people very effectively, and the potential synergy if they got together more often.

At present, this creativity is not matched by public or private investment in venues for arts and cultural activity. There are very welcome public arts events in the open air such as the music series on the seafront, and the Wedgewood Rooms are well supported, but we have fine derelict or underused buildings such as the two Matcham theatres (the King's is to be dark for eight months next year); the magnificent Vulcan building on Gunwharf being restored but with no end user; Portsmouth Arts Centre at Reginald Road, a creative hotspot, under threat of closure. There is no well established art film centre; there is very little public art of real quality; a proposal for a new public park at St. James's Hospital does not yet enjoy public backing; and there is much poorly designed public and private building and ugly street furniture.

Other cities see investment in cultural facilities and excellence of design in the public realm as a leader for inward investment and enhancement of the local economy. This could surely be true of Portsmouth too. Chris Carrell, City Arts Administrator is preparing to set up an arts panel, but this will be vetting proposals rather than initiating development in the arts. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport have

asked all local authorities to prepare cultural policies by next year, specifically linking arts and urban regeneration, which we should surely be involved in. The Prime Minister has announced that government departments will be urged to improve the quality of public buildings, and local authorities have a duty under Planning Policy Guidance I to insist on well designed development applications. The quality of actual decisions are not matched by these strictures. Our aim in calling this meeting is to try to transform this potential for an enriched cultural life into reality, and if possible to gear the separate and potentially rival bids for funding into a multi-stranded longterm strategy. Please let me know if you are coming, so we can hire the right sized room. If you are not able to attend on 4 November, please make contact with your thoughts on how the city's creative potential can be enhanced.

Celia Clark

AKTER (Action for Kings Theatre Restoration) presents :
Sleeping Beauties, Beer Barrels and Cyanide: rescuing theatres from some strange fates,
 - a Lecture by Peter Longman, Director of the Theatres Trust on Tuesday 31 October 7.30 at the New Theatre Royal.
 Raffle & collection for King's Theatre and New Theatre Royal Restoration Funds. Bar open from 7pm. RSVP Paddy Drew 023 9282 4188.

The Portsmouth Society, Registered Charity no. 266116

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We welcome new members. Please come to any of our meetings or contact Jean Thompson for more details.